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WSOA3003

Exam Reflection

Intention

The aim of this reflection is to discuss the process and the design choices behind the game *NUTZ! … And Other Thingz*. This game is a prototype and the result of the project plan that was created for a previous assignment. This essay will mention the changes and aspects that were left out from the initial project plan and why it was changed as well as reflections of those changes. The intention of this project is to show how the iterative design process can also influence the original idea of the game.

The original idea for *NUTZ* was an explorative 2D platformer that allowed the player to explore the world and the level. There was not much thought as to how the game will be designed, the visual aesthetics of the game as well as how the player should feel when playing.

My intention for *NUTZ! … And Other Thingz* was to create an explorative 2D platformer that was focussed on the exploration and had minimal enemy encounters. One of the design goals for the game was that the players have a relaxing experiencing. I also wanted the game to have a resource management element with it that allowed the player to trade with NPCs for other resources. Having a functional and testable prototype was the end goal for this assignment.

Process

The first thing that was done was rescoping the original project plan for this project as there were many different elements that made the game seemed over-scoped. The time period the for the design process was made shorter, from a month to 2,5 weeks, thus there were elements that had to be reduced.

The mechanics of the game include basic movement, moving left and right, and jumping for the character. The character can also jump on a patrolling enemy fox to kill the enemy. The player collects acorns as it is their currency as well as items they need to progress through the level.

The player's speed slows down when they have collected more that 15 acorns. This means that the player's jump height it less than the original and the player cannot jump from platform to platform. Therefore, there are checkpoints throughout the level, where the player can bank their acorns and 'store' them so they can still progress to the end as well as to move faster through the level (See Figure 1). The player cannot access the banked acorns to purchase any of the resources.

There are two types of NPCs, a patrolling enemy fox, and a friendly owl NPC. The patrolling enemy can kill the player if it collides with the player. The friendly NPC is where the player can trade acorns for other resources.

The player can trade acorns for twigs and berries from the friendly NPC. This is done by the player clicking on buttons that pop up with the character interacts with the friendly NPC. When the player clicks on a button, it subtracts 2 acorns from the player's acorn stash and adds to the amount of the respective resource (See Figure 2).

The end goal of the game is to collect a certain number of acorns as well as twigs and berries. The win condition for the game is collecting at least 20 acorns, 4 twigs and 5 berries. This was done so that the player makes use of all the systems in the game and has other objectives to achieve before it reaches the end of the game.

Reflection

I wanted to try and stick to the original project plan as much as I could and try and keep as much of the elements as I could while still keeping the game in scope and making sure that I was still capable of implementing the different aspects.

The player movement is due to the fact that game is a platformer and is stereotypically how characters move in most platformers, like *Super Mario Bros.* This is also because it was a game genre that the group was familiar with and enjoyed making as there are different elements that can added to a platformer to make it unique as well as the designer can influence the difficulty of the game through the level design.

I chose to leave out the special ability elements, from the original project plan, as I wanted the game to be more focused on exploration and I made the level design relatively simple and easily accessible. I also chose to leave the spatial puzzle elements out of this game because I implemented it through the level design and how the player could only access certain platforms by finding another pathway, which in turn adds to the exploration elements of the game.

Once the basic systems, such as the inventory, checkpoint, collection, and trading, as well as the basic movement for the player and the NPCs, most of the changes were value changes and testing different aspects. Some of the questions that were posed to the playtester's are as follows:

- Rate the game out of 10.
- Was it fun and why?
- Did you get a relaxing/chilled vibe?
- Was too easy or difficult to get to the end?
- Other issues?
- Additional comments and recommendations

The choice of slowing down the player's speed once they have too many acorns was a result of feedback when the original project was proposed This was added to the game as to add an element that was different to the player as well as to keep the player engaged and immersed with the game.

The limit of acorns was tested as it was dependant on how many other resources and acorns the player needed to complete the game. The feedback was that the value was too high at first thus it was reduced to 15 acorns because the number of resources and acorns needed also reduced after testing them.

The patrolling enemy is a type of enemy I wanted to add in as it is also a stereotypical type of enemy that is in most platformers. I also added in the friendly NPC into the game as, besides the fact it was part of the original project plan, was because it added another element the game that made it less of a stereotypical, mundane platformer and allowed the player to have more agency.

Having a trade system adds to the resource management of the game as the player must be aware of how many acorns they have banked at the checkpoints as well as how many they have that they can use to trade. This was added as to give the player a purpose to play the game without going from one point to another.

Other issues that had arisen during playtest, regarding the player, include issues with the collider when the player jumps in certain areas as well as when the player jumps on the patrolling foxes. The issue with the fox was temporarily fixed but not fixed permanently and thus can be improved on in future iterations. Once the enemy is killed in the level, the rest of the patrolling enemies also disappear in the level, this was not

fixed due to the mismanagement of time but can be fixed in future iterations. There were areas in the level where the player could not jump due to the collider as well, this can be refined in future iterations.

Feedback from playtests also pointed out that the berry and twig resources still increased after the player had collected enough of resources from the Owl friendly NPC. This was fixed by making sure that the button disappeared after the resource reached the limit. The player is not allowed to bank acorns or purchase resources if the number of acorns is lower than what is needed for the mechanic which was the result of being tested and noticed that the acorn value would be a negative number.

Although I intended for the game to have a relaxing gameplay, playtest feedback suggested that it was more frustrating, in a good way. I liked the idea of players being frustrated as kept the players immersed and engaged with the game, which I did intend but this can be altered to have a relaxing gameplay and potentially incorporate frustration.

Playtesters liked the concept of Mr Chonks slowing down if he has too many acorns as it was something they had not seen in many games, and it was different. It also encouraged the player to be aware of what was happening in the game. According to the playtesters, the visual aesthetics, the simple and geometric design, made the game addictive in the sense that they just wanted to stay in the level and walk around even though they had completed all the objective and Mr Chonks can go home.

The fact that there was not a specific and elaborate narrative to the game, playtesters enjoyed the idea of creating their own stories and creating their own mini objectives. Playtester also enjoyed the fact that the level was not difficult or too easy to complete.

One playtester suggested that it would be helpful to have a small map of the level that they had access to, to indicate where the friendly NPCs and checkpoints were in the level. I did not think of this aspect and thought it would be an element to add in future iterations especially if there will be multiple levels in another iteration. Another aspect that a playtester felt was missing was adding more narratives with the friendly NPC because they felt that the Owl was not persuasive enough, thus this can be added in future iterations.

The start of the process, creating and conceptualising the game as group has taught me that you need to weary of other people's abilities and their opinions. This also taught

me that plans can change drastically as development starts and how time can easily be lost and used for things that were not expected to take as long as they did.

Appendix

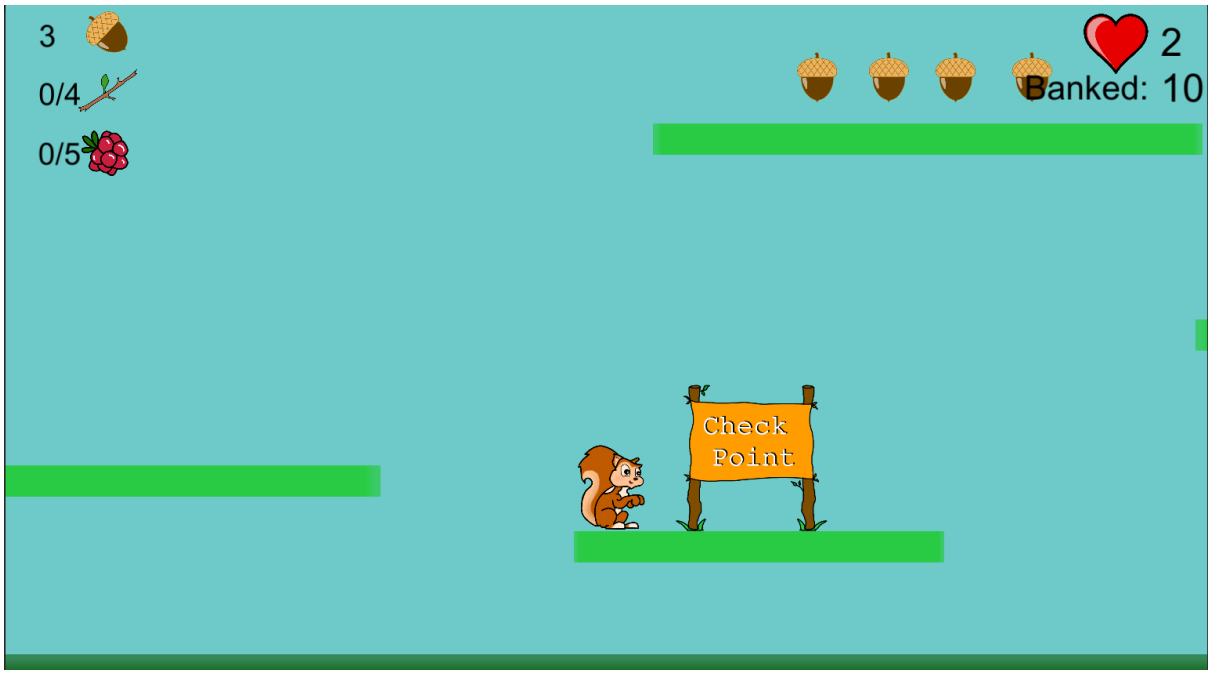

Figure 1: Screenshot of a checkpoint in *NUTZ!... And Other Thingz*

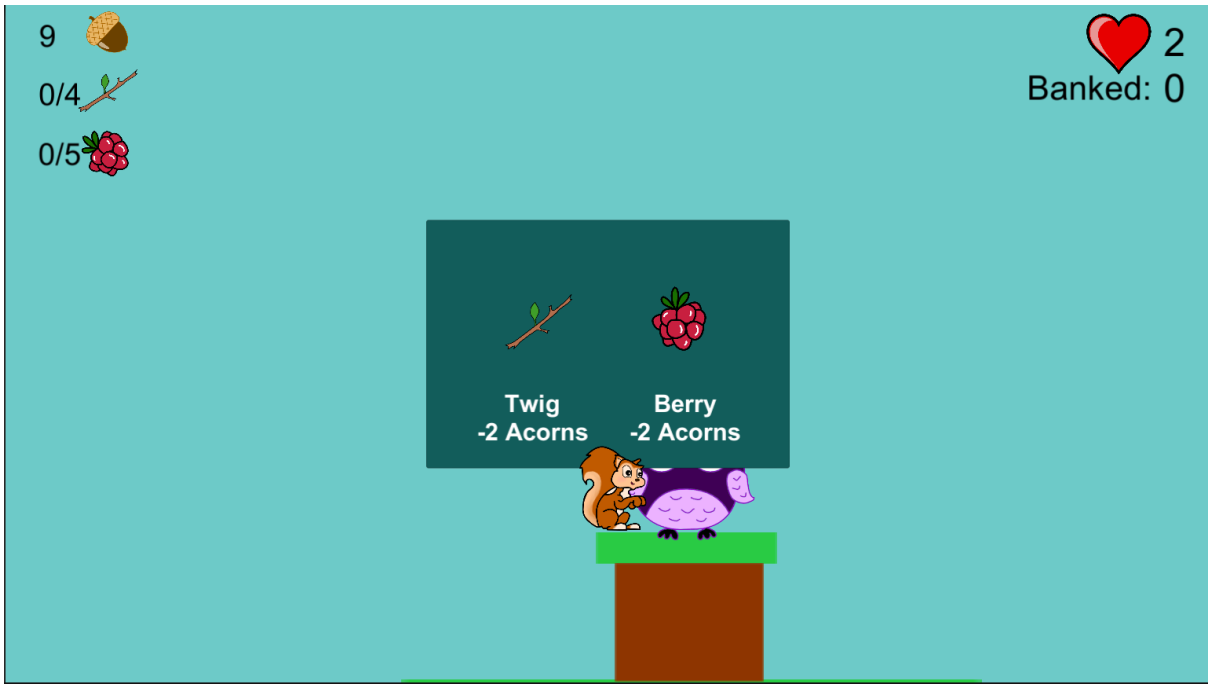

Figure 2*:* Screenshot of the trading mechanics in *NUTZ!... And Other Thingz*

Changed Project Plan

(All that has changed drastically is the game introduction and the feature lists, everything else is similar but not completely different.)

Game Introduction

Help Mr Chonks collect enough acorns and make it all the way home before it gets dark! NUTZ is a 2D explorative platformer where the player controls a squirrel who needs to progress through a level, collecting objects, and avoiding enemies as well as obstacles to successfully make it home. The squirrel is given a large world to explore and gather acorns as currency. Mr Chonks will need to gather as many acorns as possible to not only help him progress, but also enable him to become more agile when exploring the world as well as purchasing other resources needed to complete the level. But be warned, the more acorns he has in his cheek pouches, the slower he will be. Checkpoints are scattered throughout the level, allowing the squirrel the option of depositing collected acorns to add to the final score, however these acorns, once banked, cannot be used to purchase resources.

This project will progress using the iterative design methodology over the course of 2 and a half weeks starting on the 8th of June and ending just before the exam deadline on the 25th of June. The intended outcome will be a relaxed, thematically driven game that encourages player exploration. When the player collects a certain amount of each resource, they can end the level and go home.

The final prototype of should give the player a sense on exploration as well as have a functional and simple inventory and trading system. The player should be able to sense some sort of progression in the game system as well as the results and actions of the game communicated clearly to the player. The final outcome of this project is that a working prototype, with all the given core concepts and systems implemented, will be produced rather than a full game which will leave space for further and future iterations.

Feature List

The feature list for the final iteration will be made up of different elements that will be created and added from previous iterations. The following features for the final prototype, categorised into different aspects, are as follows:

Player:

- ☐ Squirrel art assets and animations
- ☐ Movement
- ☐ Inventory speed ratio to resources
- ☐ Health System
  - Purchase resources
- ☐ Player sound effects

NPC Characters:

- ☐ Enemy patrolling foxes
- ☐ Friendly creatures to trade with and get help from.
  - Used for visual information or interactable to activate trade system.

Key feedback features:

- ☐ Health bar
- ☐ Character animations
- ☐ Acorn counter
- ☐ Feedback Information (Sound effects, animation).
  - When a player does something, it is impactful.
- ☐ Inventory bag that can be opened with a button on the keyboard (visual cues for inventory)

Game systems:

- ☐ Checkpoint system

- ☐ Inventory system
- ☐ Trade system

Level design:

- ☐ Level Visual Assets
  - ○ background area, trees, platforms, bridges, darkening sky, etc.

Task Breakdown

Features can be broken down into different categories that prioritise feature over others. This can be broken up using the MoSCoW prioritising method. The MoSCoW is a prioritising method that breaks down tasks into four different categories, which include Must Have, Should Have, Could Have and Will Not Have. The game features of NUTZ can be further categorised as the following:

Must Haves

- ☐ A player controller.
- ☐ An inventory system.
- ☐ A trading system.
- ☐ A collection system.
- ☐ A basic level design.
- ☐ NPC controllers.

Should Have

The game should contain elements that contributes to the theme of NUTZ, such as art elements that sticks with the theme of squirrels in their natural habitat. The final iteration should contain NPC narrative interactions that contribute to the overarching story.

Could Have

The final iteration could have some balancing but unrefined due to time limits.

Will Not Have

The final iteration of NUTZ will not include multiple levels but is a possibility for future iterations.

Dependencies and Risks

As a result of the game being broken into different iterations that will focus on creating and adding different elements, a new iteration can only start once the previous elements have implemented into its assigned iteration.

Instead of using notional points or hour assignments, the scheduling is broken up into days, therefore allocating full days to specific tasks instead of hours. This is to account for any unexpected risks such as power outages or other exam assignments. Other risks could include mismanaging time, demotivation.